Ground-breaking forecasting keeps Olympic rowing on course

28 July 2012 - Ground-breaking high resolution weather forecasting lies at the heart of the Met Office's services to the Olympic Games, providing the best advice available to both the organisers and competitors at venues in London and across the UK.

The London 2012 Olympic Games got underway in spectacular style on Friday night. As forecast, the Olympic Park saw a brief shower in the run up to the opening ceremony and the main event stayed dry.

The Met Office has been working with LOCOG, providing both longer term planning information and up to the minute details on the likely weather conditions as the focus now moves to the sporting events.

With the rowing events set to get underway on Saturday, accurate forecasts of wind conditions will be crucial to success. Predicting the subtle shifts in wind direction and speed over a small area like the Eton Dorney rowing lake is becoming possible thanks to the introduction of some new advances.

The Met Office weather forecasting model typically forecasts the weather using grid boxes of 4 x 4 km. But the new UKV model uses a much finer scale at 1.5 x 1.5 km over the whole of the country.

Just as increasing the number of pixels on a digital camera improves the picture, reducing the size of these grid boxes can add much more detail and clarity to the forecast.

For the Olympics, the Met Office is set to take high-resolution forecasting a step further by running multiple forecasts at the same time, a technique called ensemble forecasting.

Brian Golding, Deputy Director of Weather Science at the Met Office, explained: "By running multiple forecasts with slightly different starting conditions we can get a handle on how likely a forecast is. This means we can assess the chances of weather impacts in a certain area at a certain time, so we can give much more useful guidance."

Using this system, detailed probability forecasts of head, tail and crosswinds will be used by the rowing teams at Eton Dorney as they look for that decisive edge that may bring that prized Olympic medal.

The high-resolution ensembles will be used throughout the Olympics. They will then be subject to further research, with a view that the facility could be introduced operationally in the future. This will potentially leave a legacy that will benefit the UK well after the Olympic and Paralympic Games are over.

You can keep up to date with our weather forecasts on our website or with our specific London 2012 Olympic Games forecasts.

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